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FRONTIERS

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Sun sets on the Iditarod Council

Throughout its 17-year history, the Bureau of Land Management's Iditarod Advisory Council has logged thousands of hours overseeing the Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT). The council, created in 1981 after the INHT was added to the National Trails System, was tasked with reviewing a management plan for the trail.

Members met recently to discuss the next step: making the transition to a nonprofit organization that will maintain the trail and its rich history.

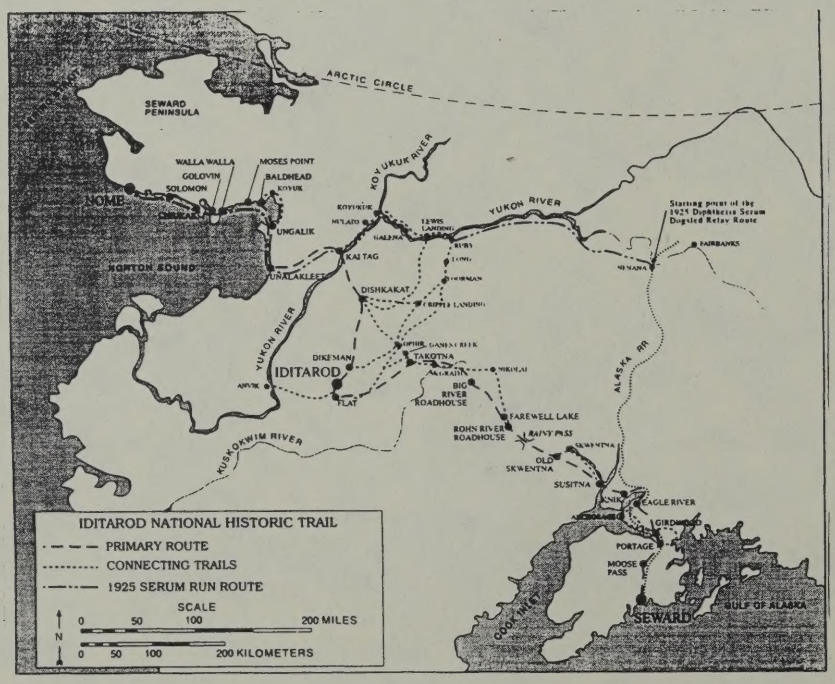
In August the council traveled by bus to Girdwood to visit Crow Creek Road, which parallels a four-mile section of the trail. The National Park Service (NPS) is studying sections of the trail to determine authenticity.

The NPS, BLM, Girdwood Board of Supervisors, Girdwood Trails Committee, Municipality of Anchorage, and U.S. Forest Service have formed a planning team to study the feasibility of a commemorative route for the Iditarod Trail linking Turnagain Arm and Girdwood to the Crow Pass-Iditarod Trailhead.

Mainstreet, Girdwood, 1915. This photo shows the actors of a silent film, *The Cheechako*. The Iditarod Advisory Council recently visited Girdwood to look at part of the Iditarod National Historic Trail that runs through Girdwood valley.

On the Trail – BLM's Iditarod Advisory Council pursues nonprofit status

A bobsled hauls a load of household goods along Turnagain Arm near Girdwood in 1916 (above). Horses as well as dogs were used for freighting to the gold camps in Interior Alaska. The town of Iditarod even had a blacksmith's shop.



It wasn't an easy life on the trail, during those early days of the Alaska gold rush; frozen fingers trying to unknot the tangled lines of a dog sled, chopping through ice to get fresh water, blinded and choking through blowing snow, hoping for the right direction. The Iditarod Trail, a symbol of frontier travel and once the main artery of Alaska's winter commerce, served a string of mining camps, trading posts, and other settlements founded between 1880 and 1920, during Alaska's gold rush era.

In 1978 Congress designated the Iditarod as a National Historic Trail due to its significant role in Alaska's gold rush history. The Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT) crosses lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, BLM, State of Alaska, and Native corporations. BLM manages the trail in cooperation with state, federal and private landowners.

Under a comprehensive management plan, the trail is maintained, marked and commemorated. The plan addresses rights-of-ways, cooperative managements with boroughs and Native corporations, trail markers, and the development and maintenance of shelter cabins.

The BLM's Iditarod Advisory Council, which advises the BLM on management of the INHT, is also becoming part of the trail's past. The 11-member committee met recently to discuss its transition to a nonprofit organization.

The members, many who have served on the council since its inception in 1981, discussed the advantages of changing into a nonprofit organization. Council chairperson Leo Rasmussen explains, "Our charter basically gives us one year to make this transition. I know the benefits make it worth the effort. As a nonprofit, we can reduce the paperwork hassles of the local Trail Blazer chapters and pursue sources of funding not available to us as an advisory council. Yet we'll still be able to work with BLM on the important issues involved in managing the trail." Until a permanent name is selected, the council agreed the newly-formed nonprofit will be called the Iditarod National Historic Trail Society.

While nonprofit organizations or foundations must find sources of funding for trail management and maintenance, they are not subject to

Federal Advisory Committee Act requirements that can limit the effectiveness of councils. The tax-exempt status of nonprofits attracts memberships, donations and corporate sponsorships. A nonprofit can work with less red tape, and invites more public participation by generating funds through fund-raising events or sales of commemorative items, and may apply for matching federal grant money for specific projects.

"Our next step is to come up with articles of incorporation and bylaws that work for all of us," says Rasmussen. "We made good progress at our last meeting, and we'll meet to finalize these in January."

The council discussed how a nonprofit would work with local Trail Blazer organizations. While the advisory council, through the BLM, advises the federal government on oversight of the trail as proposed in the INHT's comprehensive management plan, the Trail Blazers organization is made up of volunteers who aid land managers and owners in managing and maintaining the trail.

"Local Trail Blazer chapters typically focus their efforts on specific sections of the trail, whereas this new organization will have the broader purpose of preserving and maintaining the cultural values of the entire trail system," says Rasmussen.

Three-time Iditarod Sled Dog Race champion Martin Buser stopped by to visit with the council. Buser says the Iditarod Sled Dog Race is more than a sporting event; it's a connection to the past as well as part of the future. Buser is a strong advocate of multiple-use trails and says the courtesy and cooperation of regular trail users is truly amazing.

Last spring, BLM announced plans to record National Register nominations and cataloguing of the historic Iditarod Trail photograph collection, creation of an Iditarod Trail display for the Nome Convention Center, and the placement of more than 6,000 trail markers from Unalakleet to Teller. Efforts are also underway by the BLM, National Park Service, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, and other entities to promote tourism in the vicinity of Nome.

The Iditarod Advisory Council will meet next in Anchorage in January.

—Janet Malone

A little history ...

Once used by ancient hunters, then by early 20th century gold seekers, the Iditarod is actually a network of more than 2,300 miles of trails now known as the Iditarod National Historic Trail. The trail is named after a 19th century Athabascan Indian village on the Iditarod River near the site of a 1908 gold discovery.

At the turn of the century thousands of adventurers joined the stampede to Alaska in search of gold. Trails used for trade and commerce by Ingalik and Tanaina Indians were improved by and for the miners. While in summer the Yukon River teamed with boats and barges, in winter traffic shifted to the trails. Seeking the easiest route, most travelled in winter when the brush was covered with snow and the frozen lakes and rivers made ideal highways. These trails were often as crowded as any modern day main street. By 1910 a flourishing gold rush town was the center of the Iditarod Mining District.

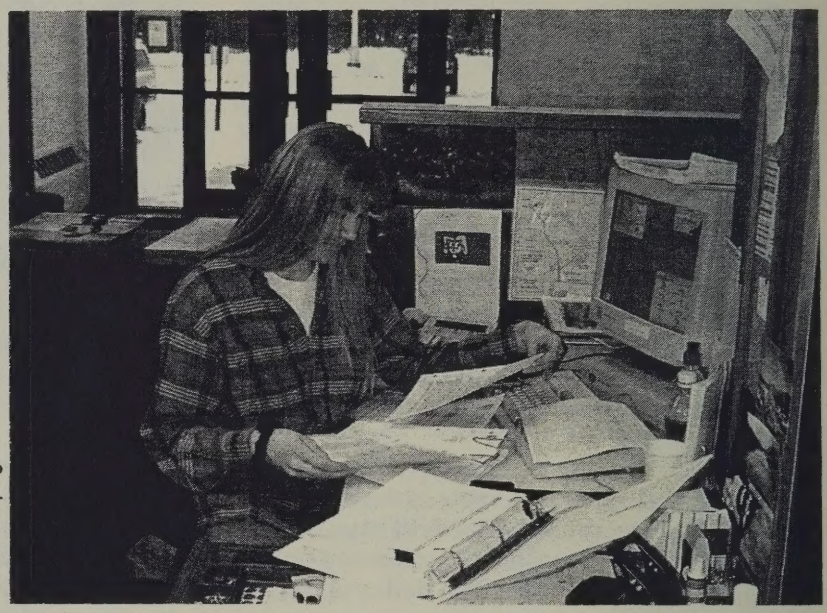
At the southern terminus of the trail, white settlers entering the Territory of Alaska at the port of Seward trekked through heavily forested lands, now part of the Chugach National Forest. The route eventually was surveyed by the railroad to connect Anchorage with Seward. Gold seekers often bought provisions in Anchorage or the town of Knik en route to the various mining districts following news of each new strike.

At the other end of the trail, travelers from Nome worked the beaches panning for gold before moving south. As the two ends of the trail developed they met in the Iditarod Mining District. The trail was officially surveyed by the U.S. Army in 1910, and was used as a major route until 1924 when the airplane came into use.

In 1925 the trail captured the attention of the nation when a diphtheria epidemic threatened the town of Nome, which was low on serum to inoculate the community. Plans to send a plane were thwarted by weather. Instead twenty mushers and a relay of dog teams from Nenana carried the serum 674 miles in just over 127 hours. The mushers became heroes. President Coolidge sent medals and Balto, the lead dog of the finishing team, was immortalized in statues across the country. The era of the sled dog went out in a blaze of glory.

The Iditarod Trail was forgotten for more than forty years until 1967 when the first Iditarod sled dog race was staged between Knik and Big Lake on nine miles of the old Iditarod Trail. Then in 1973 the race was run between Anchorage and Nome. The 1,049-mile Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, which has come to be known internationally as "the last great race," is staged each March and includes competitors from around the world.

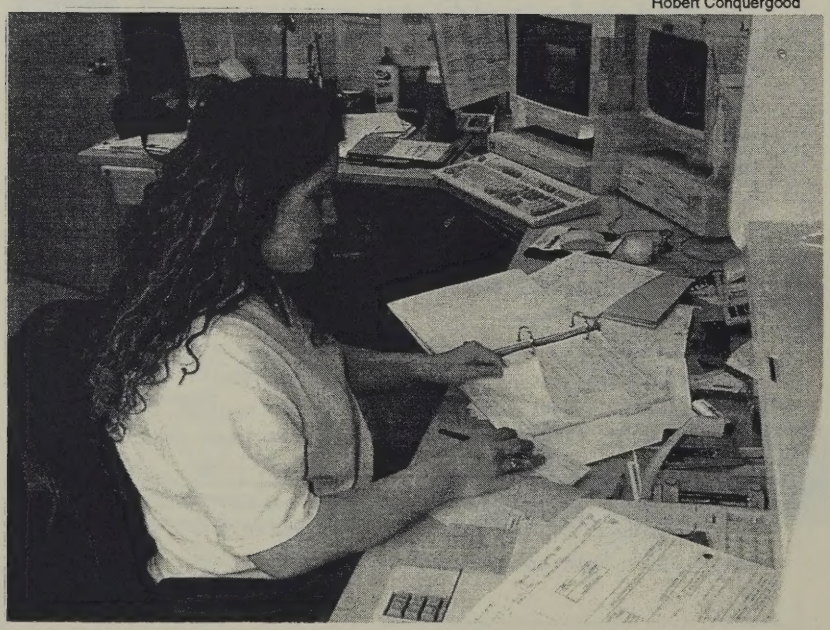
Students learn while they earn through BLM's School Business Partnership



Robert Conquergood

Ilsa Nortrup (right) and Rita Gutierrez (below) are two Anchorage high school students who recently worked for BLM-Alaska through the School Business Partnership.

Robert Conquergood



It started with a conversation between Lance Lockard of the Bureau of Land Management and Jim Utter at an after-hours basketball game in 1994. Jim was telling Lance about his job as School Business Partnership Coordinator and Lance was lamenting about not being able to hire any help due to a freeze on federal hiring.

That conversation sparked an idea. They would develop a School Business Partnership agreement so BLM could give students work experience. The agreement became official and then expanded into a formal cooperative agreement in 1995 to allow BLM to spend money on the program.

The Anchorage School District provides student employees and administrative support including recruiting and screening the students. The BLM provides work for the students and reimburses the School District for the direct costs involved and some of the administrative costs.

Since its inception, 43 Anchorage School District high school juniors and seniors have worked nearly 27,000 hours at BLM, earning $210,000. The students helped BLM accomplish projects that might never have happened in these days of decreasing numbers of Federal

employees.

Many of the students served as clerical assistants and receptionists, working with BLM secretaries and the public. Others bar-coded books in the Resources Library, worked on title plats, annotated and filed aerial photos or other records, filmed land records, developed data bases or helped with budget tracking.

They have literally changed the face of BLM. Their youth, exuberance and cultural diversity have been a pleasant and welcome surprise for BLM's employees and managers. Supervisors were able to select the brightest and the best for the job, and wound up with an excellent minority hiring record.

In the past year, BLM's School Business Partnership employment agreement with the Anchorage School District grew to a total of 19 associates from eight high schools. These students worked more than 13,500 hours in support of BLM programs, two work-years more than the previous year. All of the participating students gained valuable experience and the BLM benefited from their work.

When asked about her job as a clerical assistant at BLM, West High student Rita Gutierrez says, "It's a good learning experience." Ilsa Nortrup, a student at East High and receptionist at BLM, adds, "It gives a student in high school a good idea of what they want to do."

Counselors at twelve high schools and high school programs beat the bushes for BLM job applicants. Students' resumes are then screened by BLM. Students must have a "C" average or better to participate. After an interview, selected students are signed up as employees at the School District and then they report to work at the BLM. Their rate of pay is the equivalent of the lowest Federal pay rate, GS-1. After graduation, their pay is increased to the equivalent of the next grade (GS-2), but they may only work until the end of September of that year. Most leave the BLM job in late summer to go to college.

That's not all! BLM has other partnerships, too. The Campbell Creek Science Center, our newest partner, provides natural resources learning experiences, primarily for elementary school students, in conjunction with the School District and the Alaska Natural History Association. King Career Center natural resources students use the BLM land at the Campbell Tract at the Anchorage District Office (ADO) as an outdoor laboratory. Finally, staff at the ADO help with science education at Kashim Elementary School.

—Robert Conquergood

Amendments clarify mining rule

In order to clarify a 1996 mining rule, the Bureau of Land Management recently published technical amendments to the use-and-occupancy rule for mining claims on BLM-managed public land. The rule forbids BLM mining claimants from illegally residing on or running unauthorized non-mining businesses on BLM-managed lands.

The use-and-occupancy rule was prompted by non-mining uses of BLM mining claims by squatters, including some who over the years illegally built saloons, hunting lodges and fishing camps. In more recent years, illegal drug labs or reprocessed hazardous materials have appeared on BLM public lands, abuses that the BLM is working to stop.

The 1996 rule requires that a BLM mining claimant's use and occupancy must relate to prospecting or exploration, mining or processing operations, or other land uses that are reasonably related to such activities. It does not affect any individual who is engaged in a legitimate mining operation on BLM-managed land.

The technical amendments and corrections to the rule also address an assertion by some placer miners that the rule does not apply to placer mining; the corrections clarify that the regulations apply to both lode and placer mining claims. Placer mining involves minerals in glacial, alluvial or marine deposits, while lode mining seeks minerals that have not been displaced from their original environment or weathered out.

The corrections to the 1996 rule also clarify that occupants living in structures on public lands that violate state or local housing codes may be subject to an order to immediately suspend their activities. The rule had inadvertently omitted violations of state and local codes from the list of circumstances that may cause the BLM to issue an immediate suspension order.

To obtain a copy of the corrections to the 1996 use-and-occupancy rule, check with the BLM's Washington, D.C., Solid Minerals Group at (202) 452-0350, or the BLM's Homepage on the Internet (**www.blm.gov**).

—Janet Malone

Students sign up with BLM

KJ Mushovic

Students from the Glennallen High School display signs they made for the Glennallen District. From left to right are: Travis Tobey, Clint Heidelberg, Joseph Davenport, Justin Harnden, instructor Peter Kramer, Seth Givens, David Brewington and Loren St. Amand.

The Glennallen High School opened a new shop facility in the mid-1990s, and filled it with eager students. So eager that keeping them supplied with projects can sometimes pose a challenge for shop teachers Leonard Viersen (metal and automotive) and Peter Kramer (wood and computer-assisted drafting).

The Glennallen District Office (GDO) staff, aware of the resources available at the school and of the need to produce new and replacement signs for district trails and sites each year, hit upon an idea that would prove beneficial to the shop students as well as the district — have the school produce the signs!

"The convenience of having the signs made locally, and being a partner in the community made sense," says GDO maintenance worker Bob Frisbie, who coordinated with Kramer on the signs produced during the 1996-97 school year. "BLM provided the materials and extra bits and blades, and got a very professional product at a very reasonable cost."

"Most of the signs for BLM last year were made by freshmen students in the Exploring Technology class," says Kramer. "We have a computer-aided router machine with 3-D capability, which the students program using MasterCam software."

Students combine the elements of computer-assisted drafting and machining to program the router. Last year, students received a list of signs needed and created each sign from design to finish sanding. An inventory of completed signs is on file and the design can be retrieved if a duplicate sign is requested.

"It only took me one period (about 40 minutes) to design a simple sign, like "No Camping," recalls student Travis Tobey. "A basic sign, from design to finish, could be done in about a week," says student Loren St. Amend.

When Frisbie was in the process of looking for a commercial firm to construct a metal frame for one of the district's vehicles, maintenance worker Kurt Sorenson suggested asking Viersen if his students could assist. Again, BLM provided the materials and some consumable supplies to support the project. The frame cost less than if it had been made commercially.

"That's not even considering the time I saved in not having to get the truck in and out of Anchorage, and losing the use of the truck while it was there," notes Frisbie. "After I took the metal to the school, all I had to do was run the truck up there a few times for measurements, fittings and installation." It took junior Randy Sherman and senior Johnny McMahan around three weeks to produce the framework, doing all the cutting, fitting, welding, priming and painting. "It looked like a professional job to me," says Frisbie. "They even improved on the original design. We really put it to the test when we hauled one really heavy load, and it held up with no signs of strain or stress. The rec crew uses it for canoes and it works really

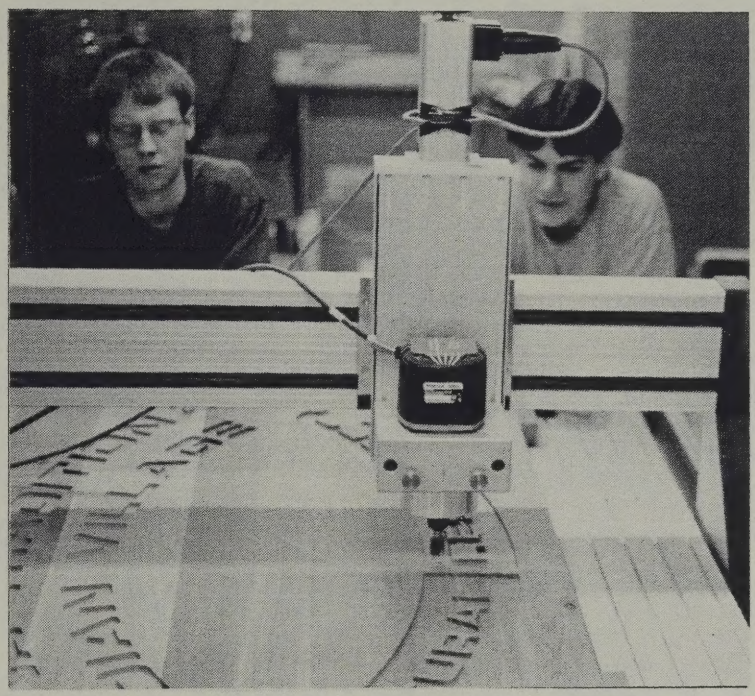
ell when Kurt and I haul boards."

"Each step and the overall finished project ounted toward their final grade," says Viersen. It was a good learning experience for the kids, nd I would do it again, if Bob had another roject."

Viersen takes pride in pointing out the skills nany of his students employ as they use sophisti-:ated welding equipment. Frisbie hasn't come up with another metal project yet, but he has obtained lumber for a new batch of signs for the students to work on this school year.

The idea has caught the attention of the staff at the Tok Field Office. Natural resource specialist Bob Burritt reports that he is looking into working with the staff and students of the Tok High School to create signs for the office and Taylor Highway sites. "We think using local high schools for sign making like GDO has done is great," says Burritt. "It's an excellent way to get a few students involved with BLM and may help instill pride of ownership in our public facilities. We're thinking this may be one way to make a connection with the youth in our community."

—KJ Mushovic



KJ Mushovic

Glennallen High School students watch the computer-aided router.

NPR-A Draft Environmental Statement available on Internet

The Bureau of Land Management has posted the Draft Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for the Northeast portion of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A DEIS) on the Internet on BLM's NPR-A Homepage: **http://aurora.ak.blm.gov/npra/**. The document is being printed and paper copies will be available before the official 60-day review period, December 12, 1997 to February 10, 1998.

The DEIS addresses five alternative approaches to future management of 4.6 million acres in the northeastern part of NPR-A (about the size of New Jersey). Nearly all of the planning area falls within the broad lake-dotted Arctic coastal plain, which is underlain by permafrost. Four of the EIS alternatives address various amounts of land, ranging from nearly half to all of the planning area, which might be made available for oil and gas lease sales, and the impacts of leasing.

Options range from continuing current management including no oil and gas leasing, to designating special and Conservation areas, or opening the entire study area for future leasing with protective stipulations. The DEIS pays special attention to people of the North Slope and how they use the land involved.

The NPR-A DEIS is 750 pages with 93 maps. It also includes nine appendices, including a statement by the North Slope Borough (NSB) about the Inupiat people's history and future with regard to the NPR-A. The document was prepared by the BLM with the cooperation of the Minerals Management Service, the state, and the NSB.

"Putting the Draft EIS on the Internet now affords an early look by people interested in the planning process," says BLM-Alaska State Director Tom Allen. "This is in line with our wide open approach for getting maximum public participation."

The final EIS is due to be released in June and the Record of Decision in July 1998. Alternatives with various land management designations would highlight certain areas for enhanced protection or management, mostly in cooperation with the State of Alaska or the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

frontier flashes

In response to concerns expressed by North Slope residents during the BLM's "scoping" phase to study oil and gas leasing in the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska, the BLM convened a working group of technical specialists and North Slope representatives to develop recommendations regarding subsistence practices in the planning area. The Inupiaq people rely on access to traditional sites, and the availability of fish and wildlife resources to provide for their food, clothing and handicrafts and preserve their cultural heritage.

The panel met in Nuiqsut and Barrow, and developed 10 final recommendations, including creating a subsistence advisory panel to the BLM, and a program to monitor any exploration and development activities that may affect subsistence. For copies of the transcripts contact Anne Morkill at 1-800-437-7021.

Commercial facilities at the Yukon Crossing on the Dalton Highway are closed this winter until March 31, 1998.

The BLM Northern District, which manages land in the Dalton Highway corridor, and Toby Williams, doing business as Yukon Ventures Alaska, Inc., signed a new lease allowing the facility on the north side of the Yukon River to close in the winter.

"Motorists should be aware that no fuel, food, lodging or automotive services will be available between an area just north of Fox on the Elliot Highway and Coldfoot on the Dalton Highway, a distance of nearly 250 miles," said Linda Butts, realty specialist with the BLM in Fairbanks.

Butts said notice of the proposed change was published in the *Federal Register* and the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, and no unfavorable comments were received.

The General Services Administration (GSA) filed an application with the BLM to extend and authorize its use of the Poker Creek Border Station at the Alaska-Canada border between Boundary, Alaska and Dawson, Yukon.

The GSA administers the station which is jointly being used by the Bureau of Customs and the Immigration and Naturalization Service as a border inspection station to aid in the enforcement of customs and immigration laws.

In order to protect the border station the application requests an extension of an existing withdrawal (the 10-acre station site) and transfer of its jurisdiction from the U.S. Department of Treasury, Bureau of Customs to the GSA. The withdrawal segregates the land from settlement, sale, location or entry under all of the general land laws, including the mining laws.

Editor: Janet S. Malone

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